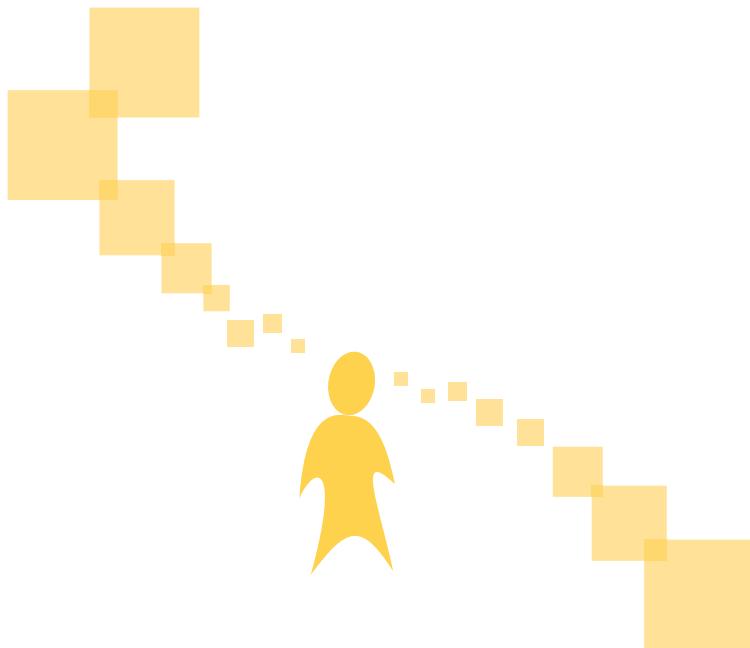


ENHANCING LEARNING

From access to success



**Report of the first experts' meeting:
Defining areas of action**

Paris
26 to 28 March 2007

Enhancing learning

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Preface

IN SPITE of the global efforts to broaden opportunities for all children, schools in many parts of the world are not responding adequately to the needs of their students. Despite being in school, a large majority of learners do not acquire even minimal levels of learning and come out of school unprepared to integrate with the rapidly changing world. Factors such as poverty and malnutrition negatively affect the psychosocial and cognitive development of the child. In addition, classes continue to be too large, there is a constant lack of educational materials, teachers are not appropriately trained, curricula are not well adapted to the different multicultural contexts, schools are poorly supervised, and many children are still relegated to environments that discourage learning. All of these factors together have resulted in a negative impact on student performance and learning achievement levels.

This document is a summary of the 'First Experts' Meeting: Defining Areas of Action to Enhance Learning – From Access to Success', which took place at UNESCO Headquarters from 26 to 28 March 2007. The meeting brought together some thirty experts from around the world including researchers, educators, educational planners, representatives of United Nations Agencies and selected government officials, with the intention of stimulating critical thought and discussion on how to enhance learning and critically examine which are the internal and external factors influencing the learning process.

This meeting was the first step of a series of regional meetings that are being organized with the objective of identifying country priority needs and lessons learned from effective practices, and to discuss directions, orientations and policy guidelines to enhance learning and learning outcomes from early childhood through secondary education.

We hope this document will provide ideas for developing new initiatives, expanding those already existing and strengthening co-operation and partnership at all levels. I would like to appeal to all to get involved by participating actively in this new initiative based on the needs and perspectives of diverse learners as concrete support to achieve quality Education for All.



Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta

Director

Division for the Promotion of Basic Education



First experts' meeting on enhancing learning – from access to success

Background

THE Education for All (EFA) movement launched more than a decade and a half ago in Jomtien has led to unprecedented mobilization of national leadership and the international community in support of basic education. The 1990s saw increased enrolment, which has gained further momentum after the Dakar Declaration in 2000. Yet, tens of millions of children in the developing world – primarily girls, the poor and other marginalized groups – remain out of school. Hundreds of millions drop out before completing primary school; and of those who do complete it, a large proportion fail to acquire desired levels of knowledge and skills¹. Many of those who remain in school continue to attain sub-minimal levels of basic learning competencies and have difficulties integrating into a workplace that is increasingly defined by the demands and opportunities of a global knowledge society. The Jomtien Declaration, in fact, defined 'providing basic education' as 'meeting basic learning needs' (see excerpts below) and called for focusing on learning and improving the environment for learning. The declaration emphatically stated: 'Whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development – for an individual or for society – depends ultimately on whether people actually learn as a result of those opportunities, i.e. whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills and values... Learning does not take place in isolation. Societies, therefore, must ensure that all learners receive the nutrition, health care, and general physical and emotional support they need in order to participate actively in and benefit from their education.' By making explicit reference to 'basic education' and 'basic learning needs', the Jomtien Declaration placed EFA within the framework of human rights, thus ensuring that learning should be viewed not merely for its instrumental value contributing to development goals, but also as a value in itself to be provided by the state as an obligation to every citizen.

¹ UNESCO, 'Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2005 – The Quality Imperative', Paris, UNESCO, 2005; World Bank, 'From Schooling Access to Learning Outcomes – An Unfinished Agenda', Washington D.C., World Bank, 2006.



- The commitments made at Jomtien are reiterated in the Dakar Declaration, and UNESCO is currently leading a mid-term assessment of the progress made since the Dakar Declaration. The final timeframe is not very far ahead and it is needless to underscore the difficult phase ahead in meeting the Dakar goals. There is increased recognition that 'ensuring effective learning' by all children is at the heart of the Dakar goals, not merely enrolment and completion. The challenge before educational planners and policy-makers is not only to provide school places, but also to guarantee that everyone attending school succeeds in learning – moving from access to success in life. How do we make this happen? What are the well-established principles that could guide further action in pursuing EFA goals so that education contributes to genuine success in life and not merely leads to a certificate of enrolment and attendance? What are the factors that seem to influence such progress in learning? How could the school system address this challenge of making quality education for all a reality? What factors outside the school system influence the progress of children in learning? What could national leaders do to create more congenial environments for learning to take place?

- There are, of course, no standard answers to these questions. They have to be investigated in a context-specific fashion. Indeed, studies carried out across the world in varying circumstances could throw light on the strategies and actions to be implemented to ensure better learning outcomes in schools. However, that may not suffice, particularly in view of the fact that much of such extant knowledge corresponds to conditions characterizing school systems in developed countries. The knowledge base on what contributes to better learning in schools in developing countries is too sparse to draw upon conclusively. While existing research knowledge on many aspects of the learning process could be very useful in progressing further, there is undoubtedly an urgent need to consolidate our understanding of the situation in schools of developing countries and strengthen further empirical explorations in developing countries. It is with this goal that the present programme of 'Enhancing Learning' is being launched by UNESCO.

World Declaration on Education for All

Meeting basic learning needs

Education for all: the purpose

ARTICLE IV – FOCUSsing ON LEARNING

Whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development – for an individual or for society – depends ultimately on whether people actually learn as a result of those opportunities, i.e., whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills, and values. The focus of basic education must, therefore, be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusion of participation in organized programmes and completion of certification requirements. Active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential. It is, therefore, necessary to define acceptable levels of learning acquisition for educational programmes and to improve and apply systems of assessing learning achievement.

ARTICLE V – BROADENING THE MEANS AND SCOPE OF BASIC EDUCATION

The diversity, complexity, and changing nature of basic learning needs of children, youth and adults necessitates broadening and constantly redefining the scope of basic education to include the following components:

- **Learning begins at birth.** This calls for early childhood care and initial education. These can be provided through arrangements involving families, communities, or institutional programmes, as appropriate.
- **The main delivery system for the basic education of children outside the family is primary schooling.** Primary education must be universal, ensure that the basic learning needs of all children are satisfied, and take into account the culture, needs, and opportunities of the community. Supplementary alternative programmes can help meet the basic learning needs of children with limited or no access to formal schooling, provided that they share the same standards of learning applied to schools, and are adequately supported.
- **The basic learning needs of youth and adults are diverse and should be met through a variety of delivery systems.** Literacy programmes are indispensable because literacy is a necessary skill in itself and the foundation of other life skills. Literacy in the mother-tongue strengthens cultural identity and heritage. Other needs can be served by: skills training, apprenticeships, and formal and non-formal education programmes in health, nutrition, population, agricultural techniques, the environment, science, technology, family life, including fertility awareness, and other societal issues.
- **All available instruments and channels of information, communications, and social action could be used to help convey essential knowledge, and inform and educate people on social issues.** In addition to the traditional means, libraries, television, radio and other media can be mobilized to realize their potential towards meeting basic education needs of all.

These components should constitute an integrated system - complementary, mutually reinforcing, and of comparable standards, and they should contribute to creating and developing possibilities for lifelong learning.

ARTICLE VI – ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

Learning does not take place in isolation. Societies, therefore, must ensure that all learners receive the nutrition, health care, and general physical and emotional support they need in order to participate actively in and benefit from their education. Knowledge and skills that will enhance the learning environment of children should be integrated into community learning programmes for adults. The education of children and their parents or other caretakers is mutually supportive and this interaction should be used to create, for all, a learning environment of vibrancy and warmth.

Quality is at the heart of education...

Improving every aspect of the quality of education, and ensuring their excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills

42. Quality is at the heart of education, and what takes place in classrooms and other learning environments is fundamentally important to the future well-being of children, young people and adults. A quality education is one that satisfies basic learning needs, and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living.

43. Evidence over the past decade has shown that efforts to expand enrolment must be accompanied by attempts to enhance educational quality if children are to be attracted to school, stay there and achieve meaningful learning outcomes. Scarce resources have frequently been used for expanding systems with insufficient attention to quality improvement in areas such as teacher training and materials development. Recent assessments of learning achievement in some countries have shown that a sizeable percentage of children is acquiring only a fraction of the knowledge and skills they are expected to master. What students are meant to learn has often not been clearly defined, well taught or accurately assessed.

44. Governments and all other EFA partners must work together to ensure basic education of quality for all, regardless of gender, wealth, location, language or ethnic origin. Successful education programmes require: (1) healthy, well nourished and motivated students; (2) well-trained teachers and active learning techniques; (3) adequate facilities and learning materials; (4) a relevant curriculum that can be taught and learned in a local language and builds upon the knowledge and experience of the teachers and learners; (5) an environment that not only encourages learning but is welcoming, gender-sensitive, healthy and safe; (6) a clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes, including knowledge, skills, attitudes and values; (7) participatory governance and management; and (8) respect for and engagement with local communities and cultures.

Excerpts from
The Dakar Framework for Action
Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments
Adopted by the World Education Forum
Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000

Organization and objectives

THE Division for the Promotion of Basic Education (ED/BAS) in the UNESCO Education Sector, organized the 'First Experts' Meeting: Defining Areas of Action to Enhance Learning – From Access to Success', in Paris, from 26 to 28 March 2007. The overall purpose of the meeting and the ensuing action was to take forward the goal of providing quality education for all. The objectives of the meeting and the deliberations were guided by these commitments.

The meeting had three objectives:

1. To share new information and models regarding factors that can influence learning.
2. To identify areas of action to enhance learning from early childhood through secondary education for development of studies in a few selected countries.
3. To advise on further research to be carried out within selected countries.

The experts' meeting aimed at stimulating collective reflection on questions linked to enhancing learning by sharing current understanding of factors that contribute to improved learning among school-going children. It was also to provide an opportunity for experts from diverse disciplines and regions to reflect on theoretical and empirical explorations currently being pursued across different countries with regard to learning in general, and school-based learning in particular. Through these deliberations, it was envisaged that questions and issues that need further research and experimentation would be identified and that strategies that hold potential for positively impacting school learning processes and creating congenial context for learning in and outside the school would be delineated. The discussions were expected to result in concrete guideposts for UNESCO to conceptualize and launch a programme of research and development, with exclusive focus on the theme of enhancing learning – a concept that looks beyond mere enrolment and attendance to ensuring that every individual is enabled to acquire basic competencies and life skills in the short run, and over the longer term become a lifelong learner. Keeping these pointers in view, the meeting was structured to focus on the following agenda (see Annex 1):



- **Agenda 1:** Presentation by experts on new information, models and processes for enhancing learning.
- **Agenda 2:** Discussion of implications, applications and recommendations for regional priorities.
- **Agenda 3:** Seeking of advice on areas of research and regional priorities for action.

Approximately thirty invited experts (see 'List of Participants' in Annex 2) from different countries and regions and specialists from UNESCO, including two specialized institutes² participated in the meeting along with representatives from regional and cluster offices for education. The expert group consisted of scholars and practitioners as well as representatives of several international organizations, including United Nations Agencies³, financial institutions and professional associations. A background note (see Annex 3) specifying the purpose of the meeting and the major thrust of the areas envisaged for deliberations, was sent in advance to all the participants. In order to organize interventions of different expert speakers at the meeting, participants were requested to prepare a brief note indicating the specific aspect of learning in which they have been involved through empirical work. Some of the participants also sent scholarly papers relevant to the theme of 'enhancing learning'.

Proceedings

THE meeting was opened by Qian Tang, Deputy Assistant Director General for Education. In his welcoming address, he highlighted the centrality of learning in the education process and informed the participants that the meeting would contribute to the preparation of the UNESCO Education Sector programme during the next biennium. Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta, Director, Division for the Promotion of Basic Education, chaired the meeting. In her opening observations, she pointed out that EFA efforts in most countries have been intensely focusing on increasing enrolment, participation and completion. Though considerable success has been achieved, the progress has not been fully satisfactory. It is being realized that improvement of access and participation goes hand in hand with quality, and therefore it is imperative that attention is simultaneously paid to improvement in learning levels. Even where funding for the quality component in EFA has increased, investments essentially relate to easily quantifiable outputs, such as infrastructure, number of teachers trained and textbooks, and not to

² The International Bureau of Education (IBE) and the Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)

³ FAO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank

learning outcomes. There is a pressing need to understand processes such as how students learn in varying contexts, making it increasingly important to improve the relevance of educational programmes. This can be done by linking them to the four pillars delineated by the Delors' Report⁴, and redesigning investment patterns in order to bring learning into greater focus. We have to move from the goal of 'improved access to schooling' to the goal of 'improved success in schooling'. The purpose of the meeting, therefore, was to identify strategies and processes that would lead the EFA efforts in this direction. She emphasized that the goal of increased learning outcomes has to be pursued without sacrificing the concerns of social justice and called upon the donor community to ensure that 'enhancing learning' be integrated into all programmes of funding, including the Fast Track Initiative (FTI). Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta reiterated that the immediate objective of the meeting was to contribute ideas for developing a background paper and concept note in order to contribute to the International Conference on Education/International Bureau of Education (ICE/IBE) and to identify areas of action to enhance learning that demand in-depth country studies. She reminded participants that the meeting also marks the first phase of a series of colloquia. It is expected that a continuous dialogue over a period of at least two to three years will follow, including preparation of policy briefs for influencing financing agencies, recommendations for research, analysis and studies for future action.

The deliberations of the workshop were woven around a series of presentations followed by discussions and a number of working group sessions on carefully identified sub-themes. In all, there were twelve presentation and discussion sessions and four working group sessions.

Summary of presentations

The themes of the presentations and discussions ranged from brain functioning to globalization and its impact on learning. Some of the presentations focused on research evidence and the accompanying theoretical underpinnings that illuminate our understanding of how learning takes place and what factors influence the learning capacity of children. Some of the presentations dealt with programmes, projects and research studies and delineated the lessons emerging from them for improving learning. Another category of presentations covered a large canvass of ideas and experiences in different countries, and highlighted the need for redefining our approach to schooling in the context of persistent adverse conditions in which many children in developing countries have to learn

⁴ 'Learning: the Treasure within: Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century', Paris, UNESCO, 1996.



- on the one hand, and the fast changing knowledge society on the other. The emphasis was on the need to recognize the multiple contexts in which schools function and children learn and the need to formulate policies and programmes that are context specific and child focused.

- A short overview of the presentations made during the course of the meeting is given below. The technical sessions in which these presentations were placed began with a scholarly presentation on the issue 'Mental Health and Brain Functioning: A Foundation for Enhanced Learning' (Kutcher), which pointed to the need for understanding the findings of contemporary research on brain functioning and also to recognize the importance of mental health as a positive prerequisite for effective learning. This was further highlighted in 'PACE – Brain Gym' (Chignard) who presented convincing evidence that stimulation of cognitive activity and learning is closely linked to physical activity patterns; and structured programmes consisting of positive mental stimulation exercises could go a long way in improving learning.
- The critical role of early childhood care and development with particular focus on nutrition and nutrition education was the subject of two other presentations. One of these, 'Can Nutrition Education Make a Difference?' (Glasauer) addressed the question of providing nutrition education and the importance of proper nutrition in facilitating learning in schools. The other one, 'Care and Nutrition – Early Childhood' (Jallow) highlighted the foundational nature of early childhood care and development including proper nutrition in guaranteeing learning capacity of the children in school and beyond. Both of these presentations shared global experiences in promoting early childhood care and nutrition in various developing countries.

- Addressing in-school factors – conditions, contents, methods and processes – was the concern of five presentations. What methods and support systems would assist teachers to teach better and children to learn better? This was the focus of 'Study Technology' (Scarfe-Becket and Jammeh), which described a standardized framework that is being successfully implemented in the school system in the Gambia. The topic addressed by another presentation, 'Differentiation and Active Learning as the Key to Quality Learning' (Kouchok), was based on the experience gained from an innovative programme in Egypt, based on the assumption that literacy lays the foundation for subsequent learning to take place. The presentation, 'Creating Learning Friendly Environments for Reading Acquisition' (Lyytinen), highlighted how fundamental reading skill mastery is for enhancing learning in schools. A large part of our knowledge on classroom pedagogy is premised on the assumption of ideal conditions in terms of teacher-pupil ratios. It is in this context that another presentation, 'Maheswari's Multi-grade School' (Little), elaborated on the theme of multi-grade teaching based mainly on experiences from Sri Lanka.

There were three presentations that focused on macro-level issues linking learning with policy-making and education development projects at various levels. The first presentation (Saito) introduced methods adopted for conducting large-scale assessment of learning outcomes, and using them for evidence-based policy-making under the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ). The second presentation, entitled 'Empowering Communities for Improved Education Outcomes – Lending and Investment Patterns for the Coming Years' (Nielsen), discussed the findings of an evaluation of the projects and programmes of education funded by the World Bank. It was pointed out that, in general, such programmes have focused on provision of inputs and have paid inadequate attention to issues of improving learning outcomes. The presentation on the perspective, adopted by the EFA Global Monitoring Report (Benavot), highlighted the need for paying increased attention to quality and learning in Education for All.

Two presentations focused on emphasizing the need to view learning within a broader social and economic context. One of these, 'Monitoring Report on the Right to Education, 6th ESR Report' (Mabusela), particularly drawing on experiences from South Africa, elaborated on how the social context and the perspective of the state would significantly impact on determining 'what children learn and how they learn'. The second presentation, 'Re-defining Learning' (Cheng), used broad brush strokes to paint the changing picture of the education establishment in the context of the emerging knowledge society. Cheng emphasized that there is an urgent need to redefine learning from a lifelong perspective, replacing the traditional concept of 'banking' in education, which views teachers as mere depositors of knowledge into their passive students.

Working groups

During the three-day meeting, participants deliberated in small working groups on four themes related to enhancing learning: (a) learning how to learn – understanding and creating conditions that facilitate learning; (b) in-school factors influencing learning; (c) social factors influencing learning; and (d) economic and financial factors influencing learning. The purpose of the working groups was to arrive at concrete observations on the critical issues involved and recommend a preliminary course of action. The observations were to cover both research and development activities which are likely to enhance learning and could be considered as areas of action to be promoted by UNESCO. Even though no boundaries were drawn, the groups largely kept school-based learning in view when arriving at observations and recommendations. These observations and recommendations are summarized as follows:



1. While research knowledge accumulates, it is rarely reflected in practice. Therefore, there is a need to set up a framework for knowledge translation from research to practice in education in a comprehensive manner. This has to include various aspects, such as policy-making, curriculum formulation, teacher training, assessment and testing; it is also necessary to learn continuously from research studies focusing on preconditions and contextual factors that improve the learning environment – such as early childhood care and development, nutrition and mental health.
2. Research has to be used to guide programme development and implementation. It should help identify good practices, particularly in countries/regions where schools function in resource constrained environments, and carry out comprehensive case studies of such practices. These case studies could then be subjected to further analysis with a view to transferring lessons to other areas and regions.
3. It is also necessary to promote research by practitioners and to instil a self-evaluation mentality in the stakeholders of the school system.
4. Learner-centred teaching and use of interactive materials and processes empower each child to take responsibility for his/her learning and to become an autonomous but active partner in the learning process. Enhancing learning through such an approach has to be viewed from a rights-based perspective, and not merely from an instrumentalist angle.
5. There is a need to enhance attention to bi-directional activities that link the school with home and community. It is worthwhile to invest in building sustainable capacities at local level for strengthening such linkages, which are essentially bound by the common interest of developing the children.
6. It is necessary to emphasize and establish the centrality of human–human interaction in education in which the success of the learner and teacher are at the core of the educational system. Of course, this should not diminish our attention to advance the use of technology in education, which is essential for reducing the widening digital divide. However, the application of technology in schooling has to

be appropriate, recognizing that there are many schools without even basic services such as electricity and water.

7. In the current framework of school functioning, with an overload of curricular activities, very little space is provided for children's creativity. Schoolwork has become so much a routine for the children that the only time they are creative is during breaks, and when they are outside the classroom.
8. It is not enough to look only at nutrition, mental health and physical and cognitive dimensions of learning and development. Socio-emotional dimensions are equally important. There is a need to strengthen pedagogic practices that promote confidence, not fear of failure among learners and teachers. Towards this end, attention has to be paid to introducing counselling services in schools.
9. It is necessary to recognize the diversity of contexts in which schooling takes place and promote a pluralistic perspective allowing for multiple models and principles in organizing school programmes in order to enhance learning and reduce dropouts. One should explore what kind of teaching and learning methods have proved to be most effective in terms of student learning under varying circumstances and through different strategies.
10. The whole school approach has been found to have a positive impact on enhancing learning. Curriculum integration – horizontal and vertical learning – has to be explored.
11. How can in-school and out-of-school learning be linked? Partnerships have to be developed with other stakeholders to obtain support, and to take teaching and learning beyond the prescribed curriculum. Focus should be on establishing leadership in each school for local ownership and development of the school in a holistic manner.
12. In designing research studies on learning, it is necessary to reflect on fundamental questions such as: What definition(s) of learning should we use? How do we measure learning? How do we measure the impact of specific interventions? How do we design studies intending to 'test' the approaches we adopt?
13. It is suggested that some pilot efforts be initiated



expeditiously, using independent scientific frameworks and covering different areas such as curriculum, nutrition, mental health and other relevant topics with the objective of understanding their relationship with school learning.

- **14.** Many teachers graduate without having learned about active learning, integrated curricula and other suggested approaches to enhancing learning. There is a need to address this issue in teacher training and ensure that teacher-training institutions respond to developments in theory and practice by improving their training programmes and strategies.
- **15.** How classroom teaching is carried out is critical for enhancing learning. Teachers have to be trained in differentiation – to recognize different levels and different learning problems; to adapt teaching to heterogeneous (ordinary classes with different levels) and multi-grade schools (mixed levels – differentiated in terms of intelligence). The context in which teachers have to perform is invariably one of scarcity of materials and resources; they have to adopt pedagogic techniques suitable for large groups. Further, how do we look at the needs of each learner without holding back the fast learner and at the same time not neglect those who are behind? How can everyone be accommodated in large heterogeneous classrooms?
- **16.** It is necessary to recognize that multi-level learning and multi-grade classes are the general reality, not an exception. Therefore, even the curriculum has to be worked out with multi-graded classrooms and schools in view.
- **17.** Creating inclusive classrooms that effectively cater to the needs of children with special learning needs is essential for improving learning levels in schools. In this context, building the capacity of teachers to handle, comprehensively but sensitively, learning problems calls for greater attention. When designing such inclusive programmes, consideration should also be taken into the needs of special groups – post-conflict, emergency, disaster stricken and so on.
- **18.** Assessment practices need greater attention. How can we assist learning if we use the same methods of assessment? Holistic and continuous forms of assessment have to be promoted. It is also necessary to reflect on the meaning and processes of goal-based and competency-based

assessment. UNESCO could initiate a programme of assessment or examination of testing methods being used at macro (global and national) and micro (school and classroom) levels in terms of their contribution to (or detraction from) quality education and development. There is also a need for greater clarity on the mechanisms and role of large-scale assessment and testing, including the efforts of UNESCO and its institutes (such as IIEP).

19. The whole school improvement approach has been found to have a positive impact on enhancing learning. Similarly, introduction of a learning guarantee programme could help enhance learning levels. This is based on an assumption that change must come from the school after a reflective analysis on how to transform the school. Linking such efforts jointly initiated by the school and the community to the provision of incentives has the potential to change the system of school accountability.

20. It is necessary to support teacher interaction groups that facilitate learning from each other and provide platforms for discussing problems and sharing good practices. The Western African model discussed during the meeting is an example in this regard.

21. The language used in teaching is of central importance for enhancing learning. It is necessary to bridge home and school experiences by using the children's mother tongue(s) as the medium of learning and teaching in the school. This helps children to develop necessary tools and literacy skills in order to move forward and acquire another language, if necessary. More research is needed in this regard to help develop practical strategies in multilingual settings where children's mother tongue and the school language differ as they move higher up the education ladder. It is worthwhile to initiate case studies to explore the issue in depth, as it is both educational and political in nature.

22. Attention has to be paid to supporting teachers and schools in a contextual fashion, depending on the conditions in which they function. Issues such as assessment and accountability are discussed, but adequate attention is not given to improving teaching and learning through supervision and monitoring in diverse educational conditions. This is an area that needs concerted attention

- if schools are to deliver and learning outcomes are to be enhanced.
- **23.** The downward trend in investment in teachers and employing teachers on a contractual basis is detrimental to the task of improved learning and quality education, as it diminishes teacher status and obstructs teacher career progress. The issue is quite complex and has become a critical component influencing teaching-learning processes. UNESCO has to initiate research studies to make a comprehensive assessment of the short-term and long-term impact of this trend of diminished investment in teachers on the quality of education and learning outcomes.
- **24.** UNESCO could commission research into specific areas that hold the potential to enhance learning levels in schools, particularly in developing countries.
- **25.** It is necessary that discussions on such vital issues as 'enhancing learning' are carried out on a more continuous basis; UNESCO may examine setting up an appropriate forum for this purpose.
- **26.** Research communication to impact practice is important. Towards this end, UNESCO could promote online forums for interaction among innovation groups and action research groups.
- **27.** There is a need for clearly stated expected outcomes: link inputs (indigenous languages; traditional knowledge; processes of active learning, time on task, etc.) to outputs and outcomes (develop critical skills; health/mental health; lifelong learning; critical skills). Such specifications have been found to be of critical help to practising teachers. UNESCO could support the above with a 'Learning Resource Bank' for use by all learners and educators to learn more about themselves, develop core competencies, life skills and possibilities for lifelong learning.
- **28.** Enhancing learning requires intersectoral collaboration among all partners at all levels – UNESCO, other United Nations agencies, government organizations, NGOs, and others.

Summary of deliberations and recommendations

THE context of the meeting can be summarized as follows: While enrolments have increased in recent years, the quality of learning in the school remains a serious issue. A large majority of pupils, despite being at school, remain silently excluded as they do not acquire even minimal levels of learning, and come out of school unprepared to integrate with the rapidly changing world.

As the meeting progressed, three distinct areas of concern clearly emerged. These were: (a) learning how to learn – developments in understanding of how learning takes place and how learning can be enhanced; (b) in-school factors influencing learning – teachers, teaching learning material, learning processes; and (c) out-of-school factors – social and economic factors, governance issues, poverty and cultural issues. The following is a short summary of the deliberations based on the observations made by experts during different sessions, including paper presentation and discussions, deliberations of the breakout working groups, as well as discussions in plenary sessions.

Understanding how learning takes place and how learning can be enhanced

THIS is a complex area and there is a need for more concerted efforts for fundamental research. Discussions went beyond the two presentations made at the meeting – definitions of learning, approaches to studying learning, learning as a natural phenomenon vs. orchestrated learning in schools and classrooms. The need for continued theoretical as well as empirical studies in this area was emphasized. Three strands of theoretical understanding have to be pursued: (a) advanced research in the areas of brain development and neuroscience related to learning; (b) continued explorations of psychological theories of learning – ranging from behaviourism or associationism to cognitive/developmental psychology (Skinner, Bruner, Piaget); and (c) exploring sociological and psycho-social perspectives – ideas of Vygotsky, such as learning as social construction and collaborative/assisted learning.

There is a need for promoting studies that can develop a convergent understanding of learning and means of enhancing learning as seen by



■ psychological theories of learning, cognition and cognitive development, brain development and neurological bases of learning, and perspectives on learning as social construction. Other issues raised were to explore language learning, which is a fundamental area for improving learning – there are different theoretical strands including those examined in the field of psycholinguistics (e.g. Chomsky, Bernstein and others).

■ Focused studies are needed on issues that influence learning in different language media and environments. Particular attention has to be paid to mother-tongue literacy in bilingual and multilingual contexts and its interface with teaching-learning processes in organized school settings.

■ Learning begins before schooling: the need for strengthening the foundation of learning was emphasized by many experts throughout the meeting. New evidence is emerging linking mental health, early stimulation of children through such activities as creative play, music and physical activity, nutrition and nutrition education; stimulation and relaxation of the brain and several such aspects – as a means of enhancing learning. Schooling, which generally begins when the child is 6 or 7 years' old, may be too late. It is important to focus our attention on early childhood caregivers and to explore ways and means of incorporating such elements in teacher education. In this context, analysis and understanding of new evidence with regard to brain functioning and how it affects learning is very important. Apart from promoting fundamental research in this area, it is desirable to collate existing knowledge along with explorations from other aspects of child development in early years.

School is the heart of the matter: in-school factors influencing learning

■ IT HAS to be recognized that as countries enrol more children in schools, classrooms become more heterogeneous. In developing countries, the social composition of schools and classrooms is changing with more first-generation learners entering schools. Multi-grade, multi-age and multi-ability classrooms are not exceptions – they are the larger reality. There is a need for more studies to understand the dynamics of learning in such settings. It is also necessary to transform teacher education curricula to incorporate such understanding, and to introduce responsive and inclusive pedagogies.

Attention to understanding structured learning processes as they occur in formal schools and classrooms has to continue. However, it is essential that alternate frameworks for imparting learning in varying contexts of classrooms and schools need greater analysis and understanding.

While conducting research leading to general principles could continue, greater attention is needed to investigating unique contexts and settings – schools that promote active learning, effective inclusive schools, schools in multicultural settings, schools functioning in refugee and emergency settings.

Reading ability is a fundamental requirement for learning in formal settings – becoming even more important with the emergence of more self-learning platforms through ICT. Considerable amount of work is being done in this area, though the results do not seem to find their way into transforming pedagogy and teaching-learning processes. There is a need for pursuing them in different linguistic and cultural contexts and incorporating the findings into school and teacher education programmes.

Integrating technology into school processes is essential, both as content and as a means of enhancing learning. Making ICT a component process of learning and an integral component of the learning environment was suggested. This is also socially and economically desirable in order to overcome the fast emerging digital divide. As the UNESCO Commission on Culture points out: ‘Exclusion from technology places those concerned at a disadvantage in the coming “information society”. It creates an ever-larger rift between high society, between high technology and the modernization of the elite on the one hand, and the marginalization of the majority of the population on the other. The swift pace of high-tech advances drives another wedge between youngsters. The “haves” will be able to communicate around the globe. The “have-nots” will be consigned to the rural backwater of the information society.’

Increased evidence is emerging on the critical value of early childhood care and education in terms of its impact on learning capability. However, the sector has not received adequate attention within the framework of public schooling. Poor nutrition and stunted growth are major factors hindering the learning capacity of children. More studies are needed on current programmes of early childhood care and their influence on the overall development of children in general, and on their learning capabilities in particular.

A related area is that of school feeding. Large-scale programmes are coming up in several countries. Some countries, such as Sri Lanka, have a long experience in this area. While these programmes are widely accepted as having a positive impact on enrolment and participation of children in schooling, there is inadequate understanding on the way such inputs could contribute to enhanced learning.

A great part of influencing child learning lies in improved human interaction and relation building in schools. This area requires more careful analysis of the situation in different cultural contexts and deriving relevant



- principles and processes. Particular attention has to be paid in this regard to understanding the situation in emergency conditions and post-conflict contexts, which need creative solutions that go beyond mere educational inputs to facilitate learning⁵.

Matters beyond schooling: out-of-school factors influencing learning

- **T**HE link between poverty and school learning is well established. Therefore, it is essential that we explore ways and means of ensuring enhanced learning by children living in poverty-ridden conditions. However, this may not be enough – it is also necessary to reflect upon what kind of education will help poverty reduction, and what kind of education is relevant to the needs of the poor, exploring both curricular issues and issues of classroom transaction.

- Fast-changing economic contexts have significantly influenced not only the education scenario but also the nature of the workplace and skills. Increased emphasis on lifelong learning demands new thinking. There is, therefore, *a need for conceptualizing and exploring new multiple paradigms of linking education and work*. Studies on vocational education and life skill acquisition have to be seen from new perspectives.

- Larger socio-political contextual conditions are equally important – political stability, emergency conditions, displacement, and violence in and around schools. More empirical studies are needed to establish effective guidelines for creating schools that can deliver effectively in such conditions. In particular, it is necessary to create an environment that will enable children from different social and economic strata to access schooling as a human right and in a non-discriminatory manner.

- The teacher is the central figure who can make learning happen – it is necessary to invest more on teacher professional development. It is not desirable to adopt cost-saving measures on this front as it would have a cascading impact over a long period – and particular care has to be taken to ensure that teachers enter the profession with adequate academic credentials and professional training. It is useful to launch a comprehensive

⁵ Again to quote the UNESCO Commission on Culture: ‘In general, the modernity framework has stressed the irrelevance of the past, encouraged skepticism about traditions and indigenous cultures, and in many cases weakened the ties between generations. Parents themselves, perplexed by the immense and ceaseless transformations of the world, are often no longer sure of where they stand, what they should do, or whether their behaviour is suitable in relating to the young. Most societies today – the industrialized ones certainly, but most others too – are caught in the turbulent waters of a historical transition in which patterns of relationship which formerly defined the identities of individuals are muddled.’

study on the impact of teacher qualifications, different categories of teachers (including the phenomenon of contract teachers), establishment of performance standards for teachers and other aspects of classroom learning.

Issues of governance at all levels need greater attention – from school level to policy-making. Many studies have demonstrated the importance of empowering the community in improving school functioning. However, more empirical studies are needed to understand the scope for and limits of community involvement as means of influencing learning.

Issues of financing have to be addressed at both macro level and micro (school) level. More resources are needed to create conditions for effective learning. Moreover, how available funds are utilized is equally important – how much goes to infrastructure creation and how much towards improving quality and conditions for enhanced learning. Equally relevant in this context is who (and at what level) is empowered to use finances – school governing boards, community members, administrators, or local government authorities.

Learner assessment issues have received considerable attention in recent years. Large-scale assessments have been valuable in improved monitoring at the system level. However, caution is needed in determining what kind of assessment is contributive to the enhancement of learning. Overemphasis on large-scale external testing could undermine the importance of strengthening teachers' role as evaluators – and the value of regular evaluation and feedback loops at individual learner and school levels in improving levels of learning. There is a need for studies on designing techniques and processes of learner evaluation relevant to varying school and classroom contexts such as multi-grade or multi-age settings, large-size classes, and so on.

Apart from making the above specific recommendations for areas for research, the meeting also put forth some cross-cutting propositions. These were:

Continue to explore the issues of what is worth learning

and learning for what. Curriculum research has a central place in dealing with the issue of learning. It is a challenging task to develop curriculum and teaching-learning material linked to local cultures and yet be globally relevant. Similarly, for learning to become meaningful, the curriculum has to be grounded in the present but preparing for the future. Focus on enhancing learning outcomes should not take away our attention from these broader concerns.



The school is the heart of the matter. Enhancing learning requires attention to transforming the learning environment of schools where learning is to be orchestrated. There is no tested formula for transforming schools in varying contexts and conditions – but there is no dearth of cross-cultural experiences. More research has to be initiated in developing countries, with a view to understanding the dynamics of improving learning in difficult conditions – under-funded schools, small schools, crowded classrooms, multi-grade schools, and so on.

Diversity is the rule, not an exception. There is an urgent need to promote both cross-sectional and cross-cultural studies of how effective learning systems are working. There is also a need to develop a contextualized understanding of learning processes and learning outcomes. This should be done through qualitative research and case studies of effective schools where child friendly learning environments prevail, learning is viewed by children as a joyful experience and where school is making a visible impact on children's learning levels.

Enhancing learning is more than increasing learning outcomes in different subjects. It is about growing up in a pluralistic world. It is about acquiring the capability and the right attitude to 'live together' in a world underscored by cohabitation of multiple perspectives of religion, culture, language and ideology. Learning to live together is not just a contingency goal for meeting the emergent political, social and economic situations in the world. It is indeed the translation of the natural dispositions of the young mind.

There is a need for long-term engagement on the issue of enhancing learning through research, design and development of activities and advocacy for change and innovation. For enhancing learning levels and minimizing the negative impact of unequal conditions in which children are made to participate in schooling, we have to change our mindset: All are capable rather than a few; intelligence is multiple rather than a matter of solving puzzles with only one right answer; imagination and emotional engagement are as important as technical expertise; our ability to imagine alternative futures and to solve open-ended problems and

interpersonal skills should be included in our definition of intelligence; there is a need to acquire new knowledge continuously throughout one's life⁶.

⁶ Quoted from Kapila Vatsyayan, comments on 'Cultural Expression and the Arts: Energizing Forces for Development in Asia and the Pacific', made at the Commission's Regional Consultation for Asia and the Pacific, Manila, Philippines, November 1994. *Our Creative Diversity: Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development*, Paris, UNESCO, 1996.

■ **Looking ahead: areas for action and proposed 'next steps'**

■ **Areas for action**

■ **T**HE major areas agreed upon for further action in the form of research and development activities to be promoted by UNESCO and other partner organizations are summarized below.

- It was agreed that while learning should be viewed in a holistic manner, school-based learning should receive priority attention. In most of the developing countries efforts outside the school are only viewed as supplementary to the school-based learning and even viewed largely as contingency measures to be discontinued when all children attend formal schools.
- Research and development activities have to focus on generating a robust knowledge based on learning in varying conditions characterizing the school systems in developing countries. This would draw wherever relevant from lessons learned and already accumulated internationally. The effort should lead to effective collaboration between north-south and south-south researchers and organizations.
- The focus of action would be on conducting in-depth studies and analysis of the issues happening at various levels, particularly at the local levels, in order to support and guide advocacy as well as policy-making on education based on empirical evidence.
- Follow-up areas of action could include assessment and quality, including the whole school approach and elements of effective schools; teacher development, training and the status of the teacher; mother tongue literacy, early childhood education, nutrition and mental health along with improved systems of socio-emotional support to children would also form part of the long-term agenda on studying

learning. There is a need to do research and collect data, in particular on the contract and community teachers; effective models and principles of teaching and learning without restricting this to learning in schools.

- There is a need for longitudinal research to examine the role of the school as well as the home in affecting learning outcomes. Studies have to help build improved partnership between schools and homes in the promotion of learning by children.
- Language and learning is a diverse, complex issue, and it is not easy to capture through short-term empirical studies. It is worthwhile to compile a state-of-the-art review of language and learning.
- Learning assessment has for too long and quite aggressively focused on measurable cognitive outcomes essentially based on traditional examinations and large-scale testing projects. The perspective on assessment has to be broadened. Values and attitudes need to be looked at as part of the assessment process.
- Curriculum studies on what is worth teaching and learning should also form part of the action framework. Again, this should be viewed from a wider angle of social and cultural contexts. Recognition of and respect for pluralistic (or multiple) perspectives is critical in empirical explorations, particularly in global comparisons for promoting learning in a meaningful manner.
- Research contributing to improvement in teacher development and training is required so that teachers working in difficult conditions can adapt to the changing paradigms of learning in the context of globalization by acquiring new and relevant skills. Improved teacher training could have a multiplier effect on the way teaching-learning processes are organized and learning outcomes are influenced.
- Other issues for further action could include development of knowledge sharing networks on learning, creating forums for continuous exchange of ideas and innovations through south-south collaboration, and documentation of successful practices in enhancing learning under varying



circumstances. UNESCO and other allied institutions could help set up online discussions on these selected themes involving an expanded group of experts and practitioners.

- As a follow up of the meeting, it was proposed that papers and discussion notes would be compiled as reading material for regional meetings. Subsequently, efforts will be made to produce newsletters, and policy briefs on enhancing learning will be initiated, particularly with the help of other funding sources and in collaboration with regional offices and constituent institutions of UNESCO.
- An advocacy platform on the nature of curriculum and assessment of learning is needed to keep the debate alive. In this context, it was proposed that a ministerial round table could be organized during the UNESCO General Conference, based on updated research.
- The International Conference on Education (ICE/IBE) should also address these issues. Other meetings could include the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning meeting on adult education and learning in 2009, and the next High Level Group meeting on EFA.
- Regional offices will be requested to help with the planning of regional and national meetings and platforms to take the discussion to the country level and to mobilize research at the country level. The main areas could be: (a) networking among individual and institutions to continue the dialogue; (b) advocacy through agencies, including donor agencies; and (c) identification of priority areas for research and action.

Proposed 'next steps'

- **Prepare** a paper setting out an international agenda on areas of action for enhancing learning.
- **Identify** priority areas of research that have the potential to make a difference in the reality of learning in schools – identify and support professional bodies that can take up long-term explorations in these areas.
- **Create/promote** national and regional forums that bring researchers, policy-makers and practitioners to reflect upon and adopt measures for improving learning.
- **Commission surveys** to assess what research is lacking and what exists, and disseminate what is available to the relevant audience. It is important to recognize that there is not enough research of practice and that experiential documentation of practice should not be disregarded. In addition, different methods and approaches – qualitative research, case studies, and ethnographic research – should be promoted as legitimate means of accessing knowledge on learning.

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Annex 1:

Agenda

First experts' meeting: defining areas of action to enhance learning – from access to success

UNESCO, Paris, Room VI, 26 to 28 March 2007

DAY 1 Monday 26 March

OPENING	
09.30 – 10.00	Registration
10.00 – 10.20	<p>Opening of the meeting Chair: Ms Ndong-Jatta</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome address by Mr Tang, UNESCO Deputy Assistant Director General for Education• Ms Ndong-Jatta, Director of the UNESCO Division of Basic Education• Brief introduction of participants• Orientation of the meeting and adoption of the agenda, chairpersons, rapporteurs• General rapporteur: Mr Govinda



□	AGENDA 1: Presentations by experts on new information, models and processes for enhancing learning Chair: Ms Mc Kay Rapporteur: Mr Tawil			
□	10.20 – 11.20	Presenter 1 Mr Kutcher Presenter 2 Ms Chignard (PACE)	[Panel 1] Learning how to learn: new information and models	
□	11.20 – 11.35	<i>Coffee/Tea break</i>		
□	11.35 – 12.30	Discussion on presentations Pace		
□	12.30 – 14.00	<i>Lunch</i>		
□	AGENDA 1: Presentations by experts on new information, models and processes for enhancing learning Chair: Mr Gauthier Rapporteur: Mr Tawil			
□	14.00 – 15.30	Presenter 1 Ms Scarfe Mr Jammeh Presenter 2 Ms Kouchok Presenter 3 Mr Lyytinen	[Panel 2] In-school factors: learning friendly environments	
□	15.30 – 16.00	Discussion on presentations		
□	16.00	<i>Coffee/Tea break</i>		
□	AGENDA 2: Discussion on implications, applications and recommendations for regional priorities Chair: Mr Gauthier Rapporteur: Mr Tawil			
□	16.00 – 17.30	Breakaway group discussions (2 groups: learning how to learn and in-school factors)		
□	17.30 – 18.00	Group presentations Day 1 reflection and wrap-up		

DAY 2 Tuesday 27 March

□	AGENDA 1: Presentations by experts on new information, models and processes for enhancing learning Chair: Ms Arregui Rapporteur: Ms Singh			
□	09.30 – 09.45	Pace		



annexes

09.45 – 11.15	Presenter 1 Ms Mabusela	[Panel 3] Out-of-school factors: building blocks of learning societies	
	Presenter 2 Mr Cheng		
	Presenter 3 Mr Nielsen		
11.15 – 11.30	Coffee/Tea break		
11.30 – 12.30	Discussion on presentations		
12.30 – 14.00	Lunch		
AGENDA 2: Discussion on implications, applications and recommendations for regional priorities Chair: Ms Arregui Rapporteur: Ms Singh			
14.00 – 16.00	Breakaway group discussions (2 groups: social factors and economic/financing factors)		
16.00 – 16.15	Coffee/Tea break		
16.15 – 17.30	Group presentations Day 2 reflection and wrap-up Rapporteurs' reports of Day 1 and 2		

DAY 3 Wednesday 28 March

AGENDA 3: Seek advice on areas of research and regional priorities for action – Discussion on the Compendium Chair: Ms Ndong-Jatta Rapporteur: Ms Georgescu		
09.30 – 11.00	Discussion and agreement on suggested research - Overall reflection and discussion of next steps Pace Recommendations for action	
11.00 – 11.15	Coffee/Tea break	
11.15 – 12.30	Meeting evaluation Presentation of rapporteur general's report: implications, applications and recommendations for action	
12.30 – 14.00	Lunch	
14.30 – 17.00	Tour (optional) to Discovery Museum Exhibition: Perceptions and Illusions	



annexes

Annex 2:

List of participants

First experts' meeting: defining areas of action to enhance learning – from access to success

UNESCO, Paris, Room VI, 26 to 28 March 2007

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Annex 3:

Background note

First experts' meeting: defining areas of action to enhance learning – from access to success

UNESCO, Paris, Room VI, 26 to 28 March 2007

Introduction

SCHOOL systems the world over are expanding at a rapid pace. However, student performance and learning achievement levels leave much to be desired. Many of those in schools continue to attain only minimal levels of basic generic competencies and have difficulties integrating into the rapidly changing world. Human security and human prosperity depend on the ability of countries to educate all members of society. Despite encouraging enrolment trends, there are still an estimated 77 million children not attending school and countless others within the school system being denied the right to quality education¹. In addition, 771 million adults and young people, two-thirds of whom are women and girls, are without basic literacy skills.

The learning process has to ensure that the learning needs of all learners are met through equitable access to appropriate learning as well as by eliminating gender disparities. This is at the heart of Education for All (EFA) goals, particularly Goals 3, 5 and 6. These goals are closely linked to the targets of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which imply an educational component by reaffirming that creating a literate environment is essential for eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy.

¹ '2007 Global Monitoring Report on Early Childhood Care and Education' (global data were calculated using the 7–11 age groups for both enrolment and population), p. 269.

□ Current situation and challenges – key issues

□ **I**N SPITE of global efforts to broaden opportunities for all children, it is observed that learning is not taking place because of multiple factors that have a negative impact on the outcomes of the process. Schools are not responding to the needs of their students or to those of leavers and out-of-school children. Factors such as poverty and malnutrition negatively affect the psychosocial and cognitive development of the child. In addition, poor interaction between family and school — as well as between community and school, low motivation and skill levels of teachers, lack of political will and weak financing of education — can create seemingly insurmountable barriers.

□ Assumption 1 – Learning how to learn

There is a growing consensus among decision-makers and educators that the learning process is not improved simply through providing additional material inputs, although these issues are important. The learning process should be based on a human rights approach², supporting peace, social cohesion, respect for human dignity, and also respect for the bio-psychosocial development of the learner.

- *What does recent research say about the necessary conditions for efficient learning to take place? What are the key areas to be taken into consideration in order to enhance learning?*
- *How does what we know about neuroscience and mental health research inform us about: (a) teacher training and practices; (b) curriculum development and curriculum activities; (c) classroom processes; (d) family literacy; (e) investment pattern; and (f) other factors?*

Poor health and nutrition affects the neural systems, mediating attention and memory. Children who eat nutritionally poor and unbalanced food may be at risk for learning and reading; they can suffer delays in motor development, attention deficit and behaviour problems³.

- *How can we prevent children's problems arising from ill health and poor nutrition, which directly affect their psychosocial development and consequently the basis of the learning process?*

Assumption 2 – In-school factors influencing learning

Clear interaction exists between the role of teachers, teacher training and the quality of the learning process. When teachers are enabled to do their job effectively, this affects their students' learning. Research has pointed to the importance of teacher motivation for effective learning⁴. There is an obvious relationship between motivation and good working conditions. However, in many countries teachers are not well remunerated, lack job security, have few training opportunities and rarely benefit from ongoing professional support.

² '2006 Plan of Action World Programme for Human Rights Education. First Phase', UNESCO and OHCHR.

³ Helen Abadzi, 'Efficient Learning for the Poor – Insights from the Frontier of Cognitive Neuroscience'.

⁴ 'GMR 2005', 'The Quality Imperative'.



- *What teaching and learning methods have proved to be most efficient in relation to how students learn? What do teachers need to know and to do about how students learn? What are the minimum skills needed?*
- *How can teachers stay current with new information, methodologies and practices in order to adapt to the needs of a changing world? How to ensure that teaching is not perceived only as a job but as a respected profession?*

Good examples of school-based mental health and counselling initiatives have resulted in the reduction of dropout rates and school violence, improved learning outcomes (through better attention to skills for learning) and improved teacher-pupil relationships. Teachers spend less time disciplining students and more on instructing them. In poor communities and for disadvantaged children everywhere, these initiatives can greatly enhance access and inclusion.

- *What are some good examples of such approaches? How could we replicate them in other contexts, in particular in poor communities and for disadvantaged children? What measures can be taken to reduce school violence? How can we promote non-violence in and out-of-school?*
- *How can we address the spectrum of needs of all learners and make sure that the learning process addresses and responds to the diversity of needs of all potential learners, including those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion because of physical or mental disabilities?*

In multilingual contexts, cultural and linguistic diversity should be reflected in the curriculum to raise teachers' and children's awareness about diversity, show respect to others and practice diversity. A variety of studies⁵ show that sharing students' language and culture at school helps teachers, parents, and students to establish and maintain good communication, which is so essential to learning success. Furthermore, the school should ensure the relevance of learning and adapt its outcomes to the society's needs.

- *What does current research say about learning in one's mother tongue? How can the key stakeholders be convinced that UNESCO's position⁶ on successful learning?*
- *How can we overcome the fears of increasing marginalization through promotion of mother-tongue learning? What are the other fears and arguments to be taken into consideration?*
- *How can schools pay close attention to society's needs? How can curricula reflect the reality of the learner and the socio-economic needs of the society?*

There is a consistent relationship between pupil achievement and the availability of books, access to information and adequate school equipment.

⁵ The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students, vol. 14, p. 149-164, winter 1994. www.ncela.gwu.edu

⁶ Education in a Multilingual, Paris, UNESCO, 2003.



- • How can we promote an equitable policy on textbook development involving local, public and private publishing?
- • How can we assure that school systems provide adequate libraries and supplementary reading materials to contribute towards creation of literate environments?
- • What are the basic learning materials needed? Are there alternative teaching methods in case there are not enough textbooks?
- • How can we promote the use of information communication technology in remote communities and poorly funded school systems to enhance learning?

□ Evidence from data on national and international assessment suggests that in many countries children are not mastering basic skills⁷. Low achievement is widespread and most seriously affects countries where school systems are weak in terms of enrolment and school resources. The availability of accurate, timely and consistent data, both quantitative and qualitative, is essential for the effective monitoring and assessment of the learning process as well as to facilitate better national and local planning.

- • How can governments acquire a better understanding of why certain children have never enrolled in schools, or drop out early, in order to tackle these problems?
- • How can we assess that actual learning occurs? How can we make sure that a child/student learns according to his/her own needs in difficult circumstances? How should learning be assessed?
- • What standards exist that should be taken into consideration in order to monitor and assess the learning process?
- • How can teaching and the learning process reinforce retention and enhance performance in order to increase (a) entrepreneurship/employability; (b) labour market intelligence; and (c) poverty reduction?

Assumption 3 – Out-of-school factors influencing learning

It has been widely acknowledged that poverty has a devastating impact on children's education and is the source of multiple obstacles to enhancing learning. Often, children do not access school or drop out because they need to work to supplement family income. In addition, school systems are not responding to the needs of various groups, in particular those of the poor. Furthermore, school leavers and out-of-school children may find the content and skills they learn at school irrelevant to their daily lives.

- • How can we ensure that schools will serve the needs of a given society and can generate a direct impact on poverty reduction? How can we ensure that learners gain the knowledge and skills they need to improve their lives?

⁷ 'GMR 2005', 'The Quality Imperative'.

a n n e x e s

Poor children have inadequate food to eat and are exposed to higher risks of diseases. Several studies show that poor health and malnutrition, especially at the early stages of life, affect mental health and the development of the brain, which in turn have a negative impact on school participation and achievement.

- *How can we promote an integrated approach, which takes into consideration how one learns and the factors that influence learning under such circumstances ?*

There is an obvious and close relationship between school governance and the learning process. Family literacy studies⁸ indicate that the level of literacy of parents can contribute to the effective participation of children in school. The level of education of parents increases the possibility of enrolling retention and performance of their children. The literacy level of parents also correlates with the level of participation of community members in the governance of schools.

- *How can the participation of parents be increased into effective governance of schools ?*
- *How can parents claim greater ownership and greater attention to issues of school governance and learning outcomes of students ?*
- *What measures should be taken to strengthen links between schools and family? How can we create links to bridge the gap between communities and schools ?*
- *What factors should be taken into consideration in creating and maintaining safe and healthy schools ?*

In many countries, there are simply not enough schools in rural and remote areas to accommodate fully the needs of the population. Public schools serving poor urban communities can be very crowded, resulting in unacceptably large classes and unsatisfactory learning environments. In rural and isolated areas, one poorly trained teacher is often called upon to undertake multigrade teaching and face crowded classrooms. Government spending on education has a direct impact on the learning process. Results from research⁹ show that students in countries that invest more resources in education tend to achieve better literacy skills and directly improve the quality of education and its outcomes. Successful qualitative reform of school systems requires a strong leading role by governments in financial engagement as well as extended international partnerships.

- *What are the implications of such conditions for teachers and students ? What can be done in situations when infrastructures remain inadequate ?*
- *How can we facilitate an integrated approach, which takes into consideration how one learns and develops an environment more conducive to learning ?*

⁸ www.famlit.org

⁹ 'EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005'.



Project process



1. The 'First Experts' Meeting: Defining Areas of Action to Enhance Learning' will be held from 26 to 28 March 2007, at UNESCO Headquarters, in order to discuss the above-mentioned questions and reach the following objectives:



- To share new information and models regarding factors that can influence learning.
- To identify areas of action to enhance learning from early childhood through secondary education for in-depth studies in a few selected countries.
- To advise on further research to be carried out within selected countries.



Expected outcomes of the meeting



- Overview of the factors that enhance learning for development of a background paper and concept note in order to contribute to the International Conference on Education/International Bureau of Education (ICE/IBE).
- Areas of action to enhance learning identified for more in-depth country studies.
- Compendium of papers presented and studies compiled for publishing.
- Agreement on suggested research and studies to be carried out within selected countries reached.



2. A side event on results of the expert meeting will be organized back to back with the UNESCO General Conference (October 2007).



3. A round table on enhancing learning will be held at the IBE/ICE Conference (November 2008).



4. Results on research commissioned on learning enhancement will be shared.

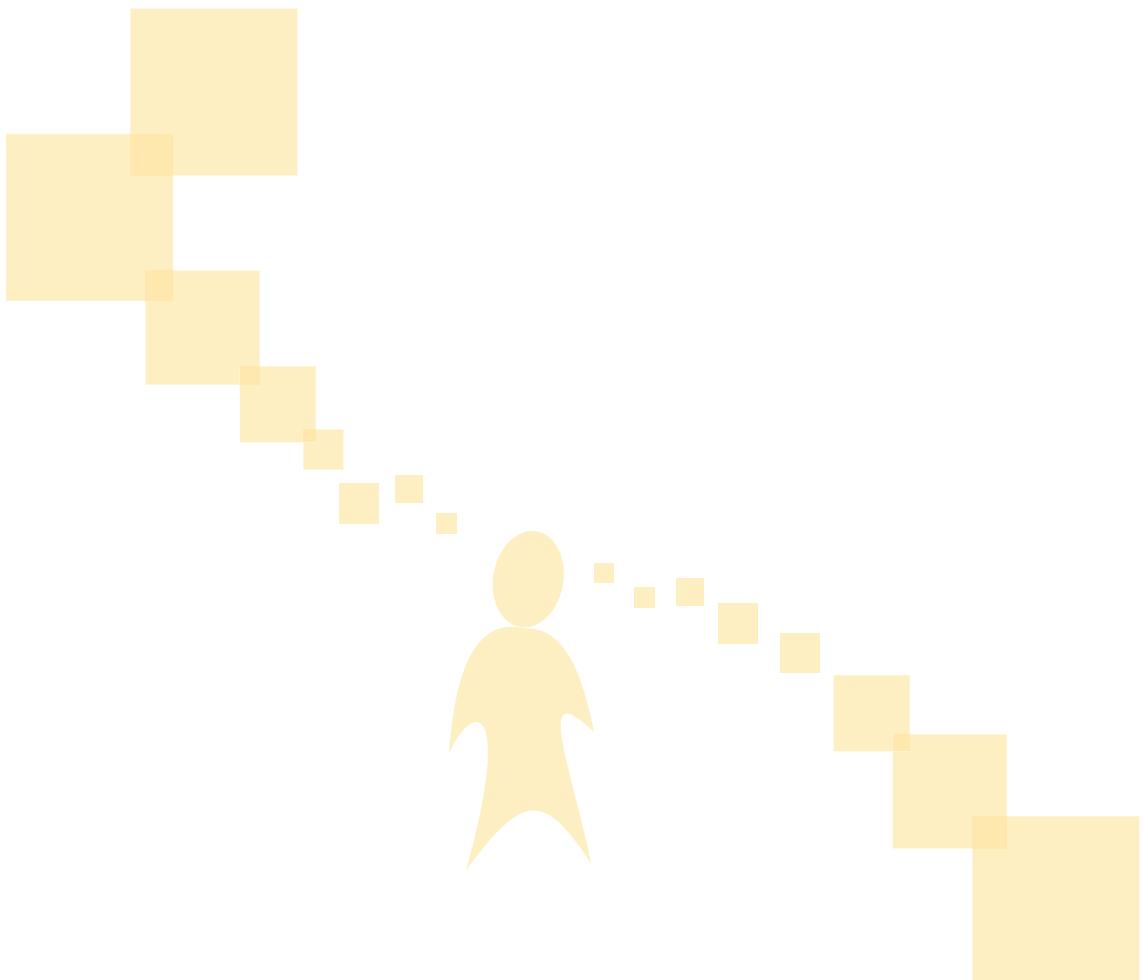


Final goals of the 'Access to Success' project

- Promote policy dialogue on enhancing learning.
- Promote good practices on enhancing learning.
- Development and promotion of effective approaches and tools for enhancing learning.
- Contributing to the achievement of EFA and Millennium Development Goals.

ENHANCING LEARNING

From access to success



CORRIGENDUM

Page 36 : Should read :

Presenter 1: Ms Scarfe **Beckett**

Page 39 : Should read :

Banjul, The Gambia

Page 51 : Footnote 6: Should read:

Education in a Multilingual **World**, Unesco, 2003